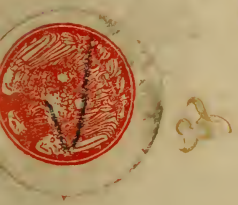
TWO ANCIENT HOMES



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1888

To William Abbot, Esq.

with the kind regard

of the Author.

Abbot, W E

Two Ancient Homes.

By a Resident Descendant

FROM ANCESTRY IN LAWFUL POSSESSION OF
THE PREMISES FOR MORE THAN
TWO HUNDRED YEARS.

CAMBRIDGE:
PRIVATELY PRINTED.
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TO

FRIENDS AND PLEASANT ACQUAINTANCE

This Token of Remembrance

IS RESPECTFULLY INSCRIBED

By W. E. ABBOT.

Dorchester,
1st January, 1888.

PREFACE.

THIS Poem, in two Parts, was written for the Hundredth Anniversary of the second house, in 1864.

The second house was built soon after its predecessor was burnt. Nothing remains to give an idea of the form, material, structure, date, or age of the previous house, nor whether or not *it* had a predecessor.

The occupants of this house, giving the party at that time, thought they might rely on the busy fingers of Time to not merely have erased from recollection particular passages, but also to have

made everything else so indistinct as to become virtually new.

When, therefore, the Golden Wedding drew near, and the question was raised, "What shall we do for a poem?" this old poem was mentioned for repetition. Vigor, beauty, novelty, taste, force are not the distinguishing characteristics of Old Age, who rather shrinks from duty and seeks repose. But Golden Weddings imply old age; why not old poems?

Friends:

The responsible writer of the following lines defines his position before you. He declines the title of Poet, to which he claims no birthright; but in the absence of "Genius, to the manor *born," is here, by your leave, a poetaster, — for the nonce, perhaps, — to touch with genial, saucy smile or secret tear upon old histories and time-hallowed associations running in ivy green all over this ancient Home.*

For Reverence, Gratitude, Love!

THE PREVIOUS HOUSE.

DATE AND AGE AND FORM UNKNOWN.

IN days of yore, when hamlets grooved green lanes
Through fenceless farms; ploughed, prayed for sun or rains;
And island-homes in ripples dipped their feet,
In undulating verdure, dewy, sweet;

Low on a broad, cleared, gently rising slope
For long had stood a home of peace and hope;
Where azure sky, in stars or garish light,
Cramped winter-noons, scarce limited the night.

Bluff drifting snows blocked yards, doors, windows, sheds,
While sleepers, all unconscious, warmed in beds.
Or strode the farmer, sowing grain or seed
Beyond, beside, behind him, thrice, at speed,

While sped the dairymaid with empty pails
For frothy milk, or dropped rough, twisted rails,
To let her frisky, awkward darlings pass
Among the wavy, dewy, growing grass.

When summer-toil anticipated dawn,
Mowed grass, ploughed sod, while slept the bird or fawn.
Full harvest-moons God's bounty still invoked,
With teams in harness and with oxen yoked.

Thick tangled woodbines, looped in low festoons,
Exacting homage, cooled the afternoons.
Grand elms looked down on vanity and pride,
In loftier worth which graces could not hide.

Brown rolling smokes essayed the morning air,
To rise, veer, convoluted here and there,
Till wider, rarer, paler flung the gauze,
Grew sleezy, fringed, and torn by casual flaws;

A denser trail, swung on the freshening breeze,
To earth still tethered, soaring over trees;
Thin, melting, mingling in cerulean blue,
Yet broader wings stretched wide, and upward flew;

Free, all, at length, from every fetter, weight;
Involved, combined, each, every mutual fate,
Their blended breath would seem a household prayer;
Hot, upward aspirations, purer there.

By night, unarmed, no bolts the timid drew;
All day through stable-lofts paired swallows flew;
Twin doors embraced the stranger, neighbor, friend,
Who loved, with visits, business-tact to blend.

Sweet, rural peace, forgotten, spared by fate;
Overwhelmed, alas, ere warning came, too late!
Noon pressed the latch, sent Folly on before;
Rash Ruin entered, closed to Hope the door!

Soon smoke and flames rebuked too reckless hands,
Which fagots heaped on smouldering logs and brands ;
For vengeance, sport to gauzy flues set fire ;
In anapestic grief thrills, wails the lyre !

Ah ! blame her not, whose sudden, strange alarm
Unnerved her bosom, palsied tongue, will, arm ;
By father, friends and hirelings, left alone, —
Young, helpless, hopeless, guilty, frantic one !

In her were sweetly mingled love and strife.
Maid, spinster, housewife, "Auntie," promised wife, —
For eighty years the same sad tale she told,
With shame and sorrow, while her blood ran cold !

An obelisk, to fancy, marks a grave
Where looms a chimney, weeping willows wave !
Peeps, rounds the moon ; wanes, twinkles, sets the star,
While blackened ruins gloom and smoke afar !

THE PRESENT HOUSE.

1764. 124 YEARS OLD.

A "RAISING," long expected, came at length,
For neutral petticoats, gray heads, mind, strength,
Sweet girls perverse, and persevering beaux
Who grasped at thorns to win and wear the rose.

House-raisings called for beans, fat pork, cold punch;
Accorded dainties, rum, hot flip, at lunch.
Shrewd beauty thought no harm to harvest grapes
From wayside vineyards, — currants, shams, or apes!

Good cider, hard or sweet, was left on tap,
Swigged, sucked from tins through straws, on sod, in lap.
Stern Temperance, himself a hoodwinked judge,
Laid down man's law, not God's! Old sots cried
"Fudge!"

Small statesmen hob-or-nobbed, with clowns, a glass.
Fair ladies curtsied, sipped, sipped, sipped, alas!
Girls, matrons, just a little bold or wild,
Grew mellow, weak and fuddled, friend or child.

In *aqua vitæ* priests owned wondrous power
To garner souls and soothe a sadder hour;
To proselyte, convert, shared Hollands gin;
Reformed a creed, forgot the darling sin.

In soberer weeks' alternate toil, repose,
Thy frame was cut and hewn — in sport, uprose.
Oak forests bowed a haughty, royal knee,
Their crowns cast down, to aid and honor thee!

Unquarried strata spared primeval stone
For cellars damp, where silver hoar-frosts shone.
Small blear-eyed glass, in charry casements shaped,
A grand ideal mourned, in cerements draped.

Rough deals, on ragged slippers nailed, were hung,
Awaiting panelled doors, smoothed boards among.
Slow kindled hope in weak, bewildered smoke,
From filial chips of timbered pasture-oak.

Of stature low, with one tremendous stride,
Thine age, thy strength, bridge centuries in pride.
Below their arches grand slide broad, deep streams,
For ship or yacht; wreck, rafts of weedy dreams!

. . . . . .

Ah! where are they whose axes, cart, and spade
Burnt rubbish, moved and changed the ancient grade;
Whose glass and plummet, chain, long links of steel,
Rebuked a rustic's guess, affixed the seal?

Where, where are they whose polished trenchant tools
Amazed the dunces, wits, of district-schools;
Who clomb from ladders short, achieved the height,
From habit brave, by instinct sure, not sight;

Whose fearless feet ran, leaped, from beam to joist;
Whose grasp seized pulley-ropes with palm more moist;
Whose maul re-echoed through laced, alcoved leaves:
Whose ring of hammers vexed the shelving eaves?

Gone! Gone! From love and memory ever gone!
Their souls in heaven, their dust beneath the stone!
Sweet daisies bloom to chronicle their worth;
Names, scripture, dates, ignore; death, life and birth!

Beneath old toppling slates and grassy mounds
Asleep, oblivion pervades, surrounds.
Quaint "Old Mortality" arrives too late.
Turns soon to go, drags, hasps a shattered gate!

A spacious brow, long stalwart limbs, as well
Their dust commingle in a lonely dell.
But living soul survives a mouldering brain!
Inspires homes, towns; lives on, in sunshine, rain!

Where fingers moulded substance, angles, arcs,
Electric mind to mind emits free sparks.
As sunset glows with gorgeous, harmless fires!
Reflects a universe as day retires.

. . . . . .

Dim, in the twilights of a dawning age,
Our history unclasps a titlepage.
In yellow, mutilated records, old,
Tradition, mythical, from lips long cold,

Dots merely seeming truth, more salient facts
Of town and church, home, daily life, in acts
Which wrote themselves in light to view of all,
To vanish, with the sunshine, from the wall!

Or Progress, rapid writer, blurred with haste;
Ere yet more graceful pens engrossed with taste,
Those hints, or records, of our state and name,
Which marry modern fact to ancient fame.

Two hundred years, in snows or genial heat,
From glaciers slide, melt, running at our feet,
Since our old ancestors, by name unknown,
Were "citizens of credit and renown."

A mist about our origin and date
Takes shape! A man, abroad on his estate,
Seems actual sight! Tall, large, symmetric form,
August in cloudless skies, serene in storm,

Stands forth to view, extends his mildewed scrolls
Inscribed with honored names, diviner souls!
From pouches peep deeds, contents of the mails;
Indorsed, illegible; we guess it — Wales.

. . . . . .

Thence quite unbroken is the olden line
Which vertebrates and nerves thy sturdy spine!
In vital breath still hot with ancient fire,
Which glowed and cooled in yeoman, merchant, squire.

The yeoman boasted grasses, apples, sheaves,
Milk, butter, cheese, sheep, poultry, calves and beeves.
The good wife twirled the intermittent wheel,
Ruled roost and roast and carved with polished steel.

Unknown to fame, on 'change, in print, or state,
A Cincinnatus shrewd, he shunned debate.
Forsook the rostrum, spurned a curule-chair,
A man in serge, the Roman everywhere.

One bud his rose-bush bore, matured by stealth.
For love, sweet-brier: perfume, charm for wealth.
A brisk young merchant dealt in Southern flour, —
Suggestive quite of buttonhole and bower!

"Good man of business," drilled in stern routine,
He left Long Wharf "too soon;" what could it mean?
To squander golden time in parlour, porch,
While Cupid sped a shaft, or flared his torch!

Could chase the maid on swift, talarial feet,
Through tangling winrows green, by hay-cocks neat;
Surprise a privilege he would not miss;
In redder, longer ears, regret the bliss!

Rake waifs, estrays, in mischief dropped, apart,
By jokers on the load, beside the cart;
Help through the bars, replace the rude split rails;
From later sunset bear two brimming pails!

Carve yoked initials on a silvery birch,
Which wags interpret, "Rector! Altar! Church!"
Pre-publish bans for troth in breasts concealed!
Blush, scream to hear what "tongues in trees" revealed.

In time, with easy manners, more at home,
He teased his truthful maid; dared, loved to roam.
To smooth slight furrows, deepening on his brow,
Strolled out to frighten sheep, "coa-coa," the cow.

With rock for bone cajole the eager dog;
With cobs for corn rebuff the greedy hog;
"Cut, cut, cutdacuts" start from formal hens;
Smoke through the barns, or muskrats shoot in glens;

Tipped, yawned in elbow-chairs, told all the news,
Strolled late by moonlight, heedless of the dews;
Forgot fatigue and tough, perplexing cares,
While beauty, fun, and love set secret snares.

No frosts forbade swift bells or swifter steel;
No surf repelled their daring, foamy wheel;
No vicious jennet spoiled a moonlit ride,
Plunged, reared, or shied at chasmal shadows wide.

No whizzing ramrods paled the woman's cheek
On muster-fields at war, where Greek met Greek.
No gun accelerated egg-nog smooth,
Made stiff bows gracious, helped old feuds to soothe.

No wilting heats embargoed journeys long,
In square-top chaise, with roadster slow, but strong.
Their cousins welcomed, taverned night and day;
Hugged, wept, and sped them, with sweet smiles, away.

Soon passed some fleeting months in joyous hours,
In azure skies, or beneficial showers.
And when at length a tiny, glossy curl
Hung near his heart — exchanged for ring of pearl;

What all the village guessed, the town clerk knew;
What everybody doubted, hoped, "was true!"
Linked arm in arm these dear ones dared to pair,
Face down all meaning smiles, a bolder stare!

One little word, alone, remained to speak;
Weighed, fluttered at their hearts; paled, wet *a* cheek, —
A word of power, high hope, immortal love,
Which angels lean to hear, record, above.

The wedding-day foreseen, the pair twice one,
No girl's caprice need now the match postpone !
Absorbed was he to catch her glance, her smile ;
Too anxious she, too young, too arch, the while.

His slippery eel he grasped with golden sands.
She strung her amulets, to skirts stitched lands.
Beau-knots unlooped, to bind a tough " square-knot "
In bonds of duty, love, for land and cot.

No fickle lovers, bound for mutual strife,
But dearer sweethearts, noosed as husband, wife.
" Cornelian jewels " clasped her neck and arms ;
More precious gems within gave holy charms.

Took thus the slip upon a grafted bush,
Smooth, delicate, and sweet, stem, bud, and blush.
An opening bud embosomed in its June,
Snatched, ere it fell, by heartless death, too soon !

Twined, thatched his bower in dewy joyous spring.
In vases graced his home, green swelled to flowering;
In fatal frost, with faded, falling leaves,
Heaven wove a shroud and dropped it from the eaves!

A dying saint, propped in her easy chair,
Her hands in his, breathed out her life in prayer!
In downy snow they pillowed soft her bed;
In tears, hymns, prayer were whispered.

Vows, which bound a dearest, mutual life,
His living love renewed to angel-wife!
"Forget me not," in flowers breathed memory sweet!
"Forget thee? Never!" heart and sigh repeat.

. . . . . .

Broad flaps, low collars, "small-clothes" gave "the ton."
Cocked hats, silks, shoes with square paste buckles shone.
Brooch, signet-ring, watch, golden-headed cane,
All marked "a gentleman, complete," — not vain.

Tall, straight, in powdered hair and ribboned queue,
Starched frill, hand-ruffles sheer, he sought his pew;
Turned not the curious ear, nor wandering eye,
But knelt in heart, as incense soared on high.

Courteous in manner, dignified, not stern,
His words were weighty, quick to pierce or burn.
In strong, true hands upheld he doubtful scales,
Pressed not the beam, nor missed just weights and tales.

In parlours, peer, in all humility;
In hovels, gracious, just, and kind was he.
Forgot not conscience at the desk, in streets;
Bade time and truth state, audit balance-sheets.

Grand, graceful, like his fine old trees,
For storms too strong, an aspen in the breeze,
He towered in height, strength, graces, all his own, —
A sycamore, an elm, an oak in one.

A moderator, chosen by the town
For reverence and trust, — no mean renown, —
Rude, boyish men he ruled with moral power;
Had oil for troubled seas should tempests lower.

On him were laid the many weighty trusts
Which earn no coin, confer no marble busts.
For him too short man's brief appointed day.
While sands were yet to run he passed away.

Uprose late languid dawn from murky night,
In weeds of woe, in tears, dim, dismal blight!
Warm on the fog the sun ascending shone;
Pure breezes swept the gloom — "Squire Wales" was gone!

. . . . . .

His son inherited home, lands, and fame!
Scratched "Jr." from his patronymic name.
A brother's love forsook a Southern mart;
Brought home his wealth and with it, too, a heart.

For many years the aged, worthy poor
Raised tattered hats, of gift or guerdon sure,
Would he but heed long, threadbare tales once more
Of " Old Squire Wales," — new sixty years before.

How often hypocrites shammed glad surprise !
Or widows would expect less prompt supplies !
Gray spinsters alternate triennial fêtes,
Or dine, alone, a week from china plates !

Good sire, good son, loved well the pilgrim church ;
Left not his faithful pastor in the lurch ;
Harked not to hear (two miles) the feeble bell,
But kept the time — and kept his horses well.

At Massachusetts Bay, with living freight,
The " one-horse shay " — small boats — were seldom late.
A pillion wived the saddle, curved a spine ;
All ages thronged the highways, dipped the brine.

One empty pew on Sunday made some talk ;
Some empty seats, — " If bipeds, yet could walk ! "
The pastor called on Monday, to his praise !
Talked long of duty, heaven, the " good old ways."

No devotees, the brother, sister, niece
Dwelt here " in single-blessedness " and peace.
Social, not " old," — nay, rather gay than grave, —
Received their friends, made parties on the wave.

What pleasant volumes might have mingled song,
Strange narratives, odd portraitures among,
Instinct with wit, or mirth-provoking fun,
When ginger-beer could pop and cap good wit or pun !

. . . . . .

A bridal party closed the Janus-visaged hall,
Where hands and hearts for union sped a ball.
While " Home " at dials pointed, pursed her lips,
And coachmen quelled their brutes, with shouts, good whips,

Symbolic grief suffused an April sky !
Presentiments were strong, but none knew why ;
And soon ill-omened joy to dread gave birth ;
A swelling tear-drop fell ; checked boisterous mirth.

Death, unattended, sought an old man's couch ;
Frowned not, nor smiled, reluctant, slow to touch ;
For he could pity with consummate art ;
Stoop, kiss the lips — to grasp, estop the heart !

Now all are dust, save her — that one alone
Whose love includes all hearts, yet clasps her zone —
Whose wedded blood unites in time and tide,
A living few, the many who have died !

. . . . . .

But thou art much the same to-day, old friend :
Thy youth, thine age, strength, hope, and comfort blend.
Thy shingles bear no parasitic moss ;
No bricks fierce whirlwinds from thy chimneys toss.

A grand old-fashioned hall we promenade,
Where some have danced, more seen, a gallopade;
Felt zephyrs dry at leisure cool the brow,
Till dimpled blushes paled to rose in snow.

That crypt beneath the easy-going stair,
What joys of frolic-fun, what feasts, were there!
What cake, pies, olives, fruits, preserves, cold meats!
What honeyed lips were sealed — no spy repeats!

. . . . . .

Looms in the sky a clock of cycled years;
God's hand impels, the careful index veers;
No pendule swings; no chimes ring mean or end;
In viewless gearing, ages roll and blend.

A "prisoner for life," *mine* old Scotch clock!
In busy idleness, kept under lock,
Thou scorest tales of brick, while restless Time
The crumbling old rebuilds, fair, grand, sublime!

The years, as rocks, pile up the mountain-age !
Thy moments, emmet-mounds of child or sage !
Sow continents, broadcast, with seeds as sands,
Bear fruitage, harvest-home, in happier lands.

A dial all Eternity includes !
Beginning, middle, end, Time seeks, eludes !
Life treads a path through perils, toil, and loss,
Twelve meek disciples follow, bear a cross.

Should one, like Judas, love and life betray,
Thou layest down dead-weights ; till, with new day,
A hand unlocks the door, then flees the night,
Come life and immortality to light.

Mute thinker, thou ! how eloquent for all,
As pale the stars, or glooms of evening fall.
Prompt sentinel, to point, proclaim alarms,
Ring out old chimes for new-born hours in arms ;

Then, as thy clasping hands the fleeting hours
Arrest at noon, surprise in dreamy bowers;
With feeling, meaning, deep, sweet flower, sweet bell,
Smiles through mute tears, tolls, tolls a frequent knell.

With swinging pendulum, slow click of steel,
Through artery and nerve, pulse, pang we feel
Insinuate, in pendent, sinking weights,
Our wasting energies, impending fates!

Thus mused Carmichael when his wintry day,
At Greenock on the Clyde, grew short, cold, gray!
Set free a sigh, long locked within his breast,
Which pendulums reiterate, for rest!

. . . . . .

Our brazen monitor forbids the hour
To eye and ear, for curious deed, or dower,
Quaint furniture, old, massive, brassy, dark,
Heirlooms, since Cristal Colon moored his bark;

Reserves full shelves of tall, thick, heavy tomes,
Whose God, whose wrath, nay, heaven, made gloomy homes.
Forgets the prurient wit which stained the play,
Gave point to satire, genius to the lay.

And yet a certain something more remains —
Not told, but felt — for hearts, if not for brains, —
A warmer, deeper feeling, central life,
Which all can share, — friends, kindred, husband, wife ;

A sense of age, and all that age implies :
Ripe thought, great deeds, and wondrous memories !
Of home, sweet home ; content ; unselfish love ;
Of faith in God, in Christ, man, heaven above ;

Strong thrills of conscience, duty, friendship, truth ;
The arrow tipped with love, for age or youth ;
A dearer hope, which onward runs, aspires,
From dreams of dear ones lost, — our mothers, sires ;

A heart of love pulsating through the whole ;
A keener insight, teaching, thrilling soul ;
An all-sufficient trust, embosomed, warm,
In holy love, which feels a stronger arm

Lift off all burdens from a failing strength ;
Or bears a crushing cross and dies, at length,
Saved, peaceful, blest, in boundless love of God ;
Adoring still, in blessing, want or rod !

. . . . . .

How much appeals to human hearts and souls
In jottings, sketches — portraits life unrolls !
Once living in substantial, real men,
Do not their nuder souls return again

To whisper wiser thought, renew the love
Which home and heart and heaven alike approve,
Dwelling as once, in parlours, bedrooms, hall,
Celestial visitors, but heirs of all?

Ideal forms, to life and law unknown,
A realm is theirs. Love — sceptre, crown, and throne ! —
Enacts the pattern spouse, the dearer wife,
Recalls anew, depicts, domestic life !

.

In boiling suds the lady dips her mop,
Scalds, wipes the "breakfast things," or dries a slop !
With smoothing-iron hot smooths wills and work ;
Shells peas and beans, to boil with fowls and pork !

Sweeps, dusts a room ; now pours the fragrant tea ;
Arranges coiffure, kerchief jauntily ;
Through hems and seams drives brittle needles new ;
Clicks, clicks her knitting-pins ; darns socks, a few.

At evening dons her silk, for grace, not show ;
Displays high heels, eliminates a toe !
Selects rare muslins, laces, clapped so clear
That maidens envy, spinsters spare a tear.

The consort-shade, blank, dreamy absentee,
Warm in diffusive heat, his members free,
Picks up small coals, woos wooden lips to smile,
Sends flames through teeth by magic, all the while;

Views land and grounds, looks sharp for buds or fruit,
For borers probes the bark, lays bare the root;
His thumbs in arm-holes, noiseless treads the floor;
Winds clock and watch, and locks the outer door;

Stands shaving, leaning, mouthing, at a glass,
Mocked by his eidolon — himself, alas!
Strops, strops the steel, splits hairs along the edge,
Dips, wipes, and cases, lays it on the ledge!

Drives home from town, at times perchance too late,
To dinner, hot, on pewter water-plate;
First greeting all the circle of his loves,
Hangs coat, hat, whip, and loops his driving-gloves;

Makes salads, carves fat poultry, sirloins rare ;
Reads all the news ; pares fruit and loves to share :
Stout man of business, in his own snug room,
A patient, feeble, hopeful — waiting doom !

His dear ones thoughtful, ever tender, true ;
For pipes, " Old Kitefoot," slippers, gouty shoe ;
While pure sweet love clean table-linen spreads,
With sugared embers warms rheumatic beds.

. . . . . .

To memory the sure return of dates
Records young follies gay, heart-rending fates !
Home offers nests alike to dove and raven.
Through shattered glass they fly ; alight in heaven !

Some buds of promise, nipt with early frost,
Green windfall fruit, decayed, bruised, tempest-tost ;
Some golden corn, good grain in silvery sheaves ;
Some fallen trees bereft of all their leaves !

. . . . . .

Grand, patriotic powder pains the ear,
Wounds, singes eyebrows, stains complexions clear,
Bursts, honey-combed, a war-worn, storied gun,
Spurns dolts who rammed, or touched it off for fun.

Thanksgiving ushers, follows dismal fast;
Cheese, gingerbread, an epicure's repast!
Glad warmer benisons break from deep repose,
As New Year dawns, or Christmas greens in snows.

Time coins great deeds, great hopes; stamps bust and date!
Hoards sterling worth, "small change" flings forth to fate!
Reversed the fine medallions, prone, in dust;
Print laurel leaves, endorse grand types of trust.

Boots, beard, frock-coat, vote, business, sweetheart, wife, —
Behold strung beads on rosaries of life!
One year unites, divides, the strong, the fair;
Enjoins baptismal love; repeats it there.

Groups Christian hearts around a Christian's bed
For hymns and prayer. The Saviour's table spread,
In elements, imparts the life divine,
Ere dying lips their mortal breath resign.

. . . . . .

How living, here, these phantoms of the dead !
They grow not old with years, inspire no dread !
Return, as guests, where once they had a home ;
Another age invites, they all are come !

The eye forgets, and more forgets the ear,
But hearts, warm, true, remember — to revere !
At home they meet us still ; heart yearns to heart ;
From heart and home they never shall depart,

But dwell with us who knew them, to approve,
Guide, bring us home to heaven, in dearest love.
On stony grades, or oasis in sand,
Pause, rest awhile ; toil upward, hand in hand ;

Wreathe from a sweet wild wayside rose, in flower,
A " crown of thorns ; " for love and faith, in power.
At footprints pointing where the Saviour trod,
They lead us to the Throne and Love of God.

Friends, pilgrims all, the sunset waits for none !
We mark our league, inscribe and set a stone.
Our dear old homes give rest in peace at even.
In love, sweet hope, a dream, — the bliss of heaven.

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